Aboriginal Educators CONSULTATION

Equity Program Review

Saskatchewan Human
Rights Commission

EQUITY

2008-03633/

Aboriginal Educators
CONSULTATION
Equity Program Review
April 8, 2003

SASKATCHEWAN
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

© March 2004 by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission.
Copies of this document are available from Commission offices or can be downloaded from the Commission's Web site at http://www.gov.sk.ca/shrc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Event 1

Thank You 2

List of Participants 3

What Was Said

How Far We've Come 4

The Experience of Aboriginal Students 4

Challenges for Teachers 5

Institutional Challenges 6

Views on Equity Programs 8

Celebrating Success 10

The Power of Stories 10

The Role of the Human Rights Commission 11

Future Directions..... 12

Acronyms 13

"Somewhere in the future, we are
going to have our place in the world.
This is only possible through education."

- Elder Danny Musqua

The Event

In April 2003, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission hosted a very special meeting as part of its review of equity programs. The event was a focus group of Aboriginal teachers, educators and teacher trainers working within the K to 12 and post-secondary fields.

Eighteen years earlier, the Commission had launched an education equity program in response to studies showing that up to 90 percent of Aboriginal students left school before completing grade twelve. The initiative grew to cover 17 school divisions, and approximately half of all students in the K to 12 system. Programs focused on five areas: incorporating Aboriginal content into the curriculum; reviewing school policies and practices for bias; increasing parental involvement; cross-cultural education for teachers; and proactive efforts to increase the representation of Aboriginal teaching and non-teaching staff. Over the years, the Commission also approved a number of equity programs at the post-secondary level.

The Commission considered the perspective of Aboriginal educators and parents to be central to its review of education equity. The participants also underlined the need for an Aboriginal voice in the Commission's consultations, and the need for non-Aboriginal people to understand the Aboriginal perspective. They stressed the need for a safe environment in which Aboriginal concerns could be expressed freely. Wishing to record the event and protect anonymity, the Commission decided to summarize the participants' remarks without attributing them to specific individuals.

Constraints of time and resources meant the Commission could arrange only one such meeting, in Saskatoon. Nevertheless, the focus group produced a rich array of comments on a broad range of topics. Repeated references to the power of stories, the celebration of success, and a forum for Aboriginal voice were signposts for how we should go about our work in future. Expressions of concern served as a sober assessment of progress over the last two decades, and highlighted current challenges. Comments on student success and potential roles for the Commission were very pertinent to our review.

Thank You

We thank Monica Goulet, Cultural Diversity & Race Relations Coordinator, City of Saskatoon, for suggesting this event and helping us plan it. We thank our guests for sharing their insights and experiences, and their organizations for supporting their participation. And finally, we are most grateful to Elder Danny Musqua for guiding the conversation.

List of Participants

Kevin Pilon, Chair, AWASIS, STF Special Subject Council
E.D. Feehan High School, Saskatoon

Geordy McCaffrey, Principal, *Gabriel Dumont Institute*

Brenda Green, Teacher, *Joe Duquette High School, Saskatoon*

Sheila Kennedy, Teacher, *Princess Alexandra Community School, Saskatoon*

Anna-Leah King, Curriculum Writer
Sharon Laflamme, Aboriginal Education Coordinator
Melanie MacLean, Teacher
Saskatoon Catholic School Division

Linda Charlton, Education and Equity Advisor
Genevieve Leslie, Supervisor, Public & Special Programs
Donna Scott, Chief Commissioner
Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission

Janice Acoose, Faculty
Dr. Danny Musqua, Faculty (Elder)
First Nations University of Canada, Saskatoon

Brian Gallagher, Instructor/Tutor, Aboriginal Student Activity Centre,
Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), Saskatoon

Ted Amendt, Community Education Consultant
Monica Goulet, Community Education Consultant
Saskatchewan Learning, Saskatoon

Wilfred Burton, Faculty, *SUNTEP, University of Regina*

Roberta Bear, Aboriginal Liaison Officer
Cort Dogniez, Aboriginal Education Coordinator
Saskatoon Public School Division

Susan Gingell, Faculty, College of Arts and Science
Val Arnault, NAPN Coordinator, College of Nursing
Charlotte Ross, Coordinator, Academic Programs for Aboriginal Students,
College of Arts and Science
University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon

WHAT WAS SAID

How Far We've Come

- Those of us who attended SUNTEP in Regina over 20 years ago were ground breakers. We were often the only Aboriginal teachers in a school, and sometimes we were looked on as experts with regard to everything to do with Aboriginal people. We encountered lots of misconceptions about Aboriginal people, and felt pressure to have all the answers.
- Being the "first out of the block" was challenging.
- In the early days, there was a backlash with respect to Aboriginal candidates by institutions. The people hired were those who spoke with a standard English accent, and their performance and abilities were closely scrutinized. There was a myth that Aboriginal employees were not qualified.
- There was also a backlash against those trying to advance the Aboriginal agenda.
- In the last 25 years it seems like the questions and the reports are always the same. It's frustrating.
- We all know what it's like to experience discrimination.
- We survived all that.

"We encountered lots of misconceptions about Aboriginal people, and felt pressure to have all the answers."

The Experience of Aboriginal Students

- Racism and discrimination are an acute reality for many Aboriginal people.
- It is important to teach non-Aboriginal teachers about the lived experiences of Aboriginal people. Non-Aboriginal teachers try to incorporate aspects of Aboriginal culture into the classroom, but they don't acknowledge the discrimination these young people face outside the classroom. That's a huge detriment.
- We're slowly getting more Aboriginal teachers in the classroom, but there is still a huge number of non-Aboriginal teachers who are teaching our children and they have a huge impact on how Aboriginal children perceive themselves.

- Who is dealing with the emotional needs of our children? Even having Aboriginal teachers doesn't always ensure that. All teachers need education on the racism and discrimination faced by Aboriginal children.
- Aboriginal students need a comfortable place to have their voices heard. Their authentic experiences are not being acknowledged for what they are.
- Safety in numbers is a big issue for Aboriginal students and teachers. Success rates climb when there is a larger number of students (four to six). If you don't have the support of people around you, it's easier to derail.

Challenges for Teachers

- Some obstacles are at the individual level; some are at the institutional level.
- A forum is needed for an Aboriginal voice in education. In some settings there is a silencing that goes on, for example when a Superintendent or Director is present and you don't feel safe to share.
- Though some seats at the College of Nursing are reserved for Aboriginal students, the public still needs to know that the applicants must meet the requirements. The educational qualifications are not lower than for other spots. For example, the average for NAPN (Native Access Program to Nursing) students is 74 versus the minimum of 65 required for other spots.
- It seems to be a common belief, for example among other students in the College of Education, that TEP (Teacher Education Programs) programs are sub-standard or that students are not as qualified as in other education programs. I'm very hurt and bitter to hear such comments, and concerned. These are future teachers!
- The TEP programs are turning out very professional instructors, who are teaching on both sides of the river.

"The people here today are very accomplished, but there is still a view that we're getting handouts – another idea that hasn't changed in 25 years."

- The people here today are very accomplished, but there is still a view that we're getting handouts – another idea that hasn't changed in 25 years.
- I was once the only Aboriginal individual in a group of about 10 on a hiring committee for a vice-principal. I felt like the token Aboriginal or a little bird – my voice meant nothing. Diversity was not a factor on the point system. The Aboriginal perspective was missing.

- Non-Aboriginal people sometimes have more credibility for Aboriginal awareness and history training, and for advocacy. It's not perceived as whining when done by a non-Aboriginal person.
- A non-Aboriginal Master's student and Cree teacher helped form a Cree sub-committee that helped us be heard, helped us make our wants and needs known. But it's disappointing that we need someone else to authenticate our voice.

Institutional Challenges

- Organizational change is needed to foster a culture of inclusion and respect; this doesn't happen without people challenging the status quo, asking the questions in a respectful way.
- Why do we have Native Studies classes? Aboriginal history and content should be addressed through Canadian history and other courses for all students, not just native students.
- There is a disconnect between policies at the provincial government level and what happens in schools. The guidelines for Aboriginal education are there, but at the school level teachers may not be aware of them or know how to teach Aboriginal content. A catalyst is needed to ensure things happen. We must advocate for such instruction at the post-secondary level. People must be empowered so that they feel comfortable teaching those tough classes.
- The number of teachers has not been increasing greatly. Why? SUNTEP has funding for 60 students, the same since 1981. Why not 120?

"It is not enough to place a brown person into an institution, and then maintain the status quo. You need to educate the institution."

- It is not enough to place a brown person into an institution, and then maintain the status quo. You need to educate the institution – for example, by changing the curriculum and the ideological structure – and not just bring in one or two people to satisfy political interests.

- SUNTEP is also funded differently now. Initially, students received bursaries; now students are funded by student loans.
- School divisions seem to use "Indian money" to create "Indian jobs." In one large school division, the Aboriginal Education Coordinator, the Cree teacher and the Aboriginal Curriculum Writer positions were all formed with IMED grant money.
- It's still the old boy's network that's doing the hiring; they're not required to have Aboriginal awareness. There is a lack of Aboriginal awareness amongst hiring decision-makers at the school board level. These people may have never taken awareness courses and are ignorant of Aboriginal history. In-services would be useful, for example on pre-contact and contemporary history.

"They hire Aboriginal people who are perceived as safe, not troublemakers, not people who ask questions..."

- Non-Aboriginals need education in anti-racism and in the Aboriginal worldview. Many current teachers went through the system before awareness training was required. OTC has a group of educators who are a good resource for this type of training.
- We're not moving beyond the teacher role. Where are the Aboriginal caretakers, teacher assistants, principals and administrators? Equity is stuck in one title area right now and it's called "teachers."
- We're mostly teachers at the elementary level. TEP programs only address elementary teachers. The needs of those who want to teach high school are not being furthered.
- Also, Aboriginal teachers tend to get located in a limited number of elementary schools. There is little or no representation on school boards, city councils, citizens advisory committees, unions, etc. Aboriginal representation in STF is minimal. We need Aboriginal representation at all levels. We need diversity in equity.
- We need our people in the system – principals, vice-principals, aldermen, the police service. We're not getting there even though we're graduating lots of people. There is marginalization. We need to have people in those key positions for the purposes of better equity and fair play.

- Institutions play a game. There are selective forms of discrimination. They hire Aboriginal people who are perceived as safe, not trouble makers, not people who ask questions, not people who are going to rock the boat or advocate. So the corporation or institution does not change in any way. This is definitely a concern. People who have struggled for 20 years at the grassroots level fighting for equal rights are not the ones chosen for positions.

Views on Equity Programs

- Special measures have an important role – for example, in the practical nursing program at GDI that benefits Métis students. The SHRC allows us to give preference to Métis applicants. Numerous applications are received from non-Aboriginals also. Without the SHRC, or an approved plan, we'd be very limited in how we can serve Métis people.
- At SIAST, special measures only started as a result of the education equity program. Some of these measures have brought about change. There wouldn't be the same range of positions sitting at this table now without the SHRC's equity programs.
- There is a need for accountability. School divisions need to demonstrate an increase in the proportion of Aboriginal teachers. If they never do, the Commission should cross them off the list of equity sponsors. If nobody ever has that power, if there are no consequences for failure to improve, then there will be no progress.
- We're training more teachers every year but many Aboriginal grads are teaching on reserves while the numbers hired by large school boards are not increasing.
- If school divisions don't increase the number of Aboriginal teachers, perhaps they should not be part of the education equity program. In cities where the number of Aboriginal children is increasing significantly every year, there is not the same increase in the number of Aboriginal teachers.

"...special measures only started as a result of the education equity program. Some of these measures have brought about change."

- "Education equity" or "affirmative action," people will cry and complain no matter what we call it. We need to forge ahead.

- While I was teaching in Prince Albert, staff got together every month in each school to fill out an equity form and justify what they were doing in the classroom. The process served the purpose of accountability and information sharing.
- How do we make organizations accountable in a voluntary program? Nice, toothless policy documents can sit on the shelf and don't always get implemented.
- "Schools^{Plus}" for community schools guides people along a process of self-reflection. It asks pointed questions so that people self-critique themselves, as in "what are we doing and why?" It is a tool or instrument to guide people to move along from where they are at. The SHRC could provide a tool to help guide people. Would like to crack the whip, but people have to participate and believe in the program.

"I am concerned about moving from a language of equity to a language of diversity."

- I am concerned about who are getting the equity seats and how accountable they are to the community. The *Code* provisions were created for people who have lived their lives oppressed. There is sometimes a gap between the intended beneficiaries and those who take advantage of equity group membership, for example with respect to preferred hiring, preferred spots. It's a moral issue - who should benefit from equity programs?
- I am concerned about moving from a language of equity to a language of diversity. For example, the U of S document, "Renewing the Dream," expresses the goal of "a rich diversity of faculty talent." That could mean anything. The language of diversity does not further the project of equality, which needs goal setting and accountability. I would rather see the number of designated groups under equity programs increased than to have a vague diversity program. Aboriginal people are also affected by discrimination for other reasons such as gender, disability, sexual orientation, etc.
- There's a need to explain the connections and differences between various issues and initiatives of the provincial government, and to translate the language evolving around these issues. Examples: employment equity, education equity, representative workforce, special measures, Aboriginal Employment Development Program. We need a central storing of the terminology.

- Some students are not proud of their Aboriginal ancestry; they are not likely to give back to the community. How can we address this?
- Even though we have equity initiatives, we need to continue educating ourselves and also those non-Aboriginal teachers who are on the front lines educating our children.

Celebrating Success

- I take joy in the accomplishments around this table. It sometimes seems like we have taken small steps, but we can take pride in them. We have to keep going.
- There is not enough celebration of the successes that we've had. Why are we running to New Mexico to see the Santa Fe model? We need to celebrate the successes in Saskatchewan – the models at North Battleford, E.D. Feehan, Joe Duquette.
- We'd like to see faster progress, but we need to be proud of the progress made. We must take joy in the small successes in the face of big challenges.

"There is not enough celebration of the successes that we've had. We need to celebrate the successes in Saskatchewan."

- There's the whole question of visibility, of making people aware of successes and best practices, instead of having reports sit on the shelf. School boards should be providing cultural awareness, building relationships. The SHRC has a role in spreading the word, e.g. getting documents out, arranging forums, and partnering with school boards at the local level.

The Power of Stories

- If we're looking at a shared and harmonious relationship with Aboriginal people, then it's important for the SHRC to hear authentic stories.
- People want to tell their stories. I'm here representing my staff. They all told me their stories. There is power in stories. There is power in the voice of people who have come through adversity.
- We all know what it is like to experience discrimination. Not only do we have our own stories as educators, as parents, as aunties and uncles, but also we have the stories of our children.

- I recommend that the SHRC undertake a partnership with other organizations to develop an anthology of stories that could be adapted for use at different levels: elementary, high school, and post-secondary.
- The SHRC could document stories of meeting challenges, achieving success, and showing how a person can make a difference. We need case studies of the struggles Aboriginal people have faced along the way. Stories could be written for different age levels. They could look back on a person's history and document their progress. It's very important to document the journey so people in the future will understand what we've had to go through to make things better.

"There is power in stories. There is power in the voice of people who have come through adversity."

- A forum to share stories is also needed. Danny Musqua has many stories from the Elder's perspective.

The Role of the Human Rights Commission

- The Commission has an opportunity to work more closely with the Aboriginal community.
- The Commission has power in its role. It holds a position of respect. It is looked at differently than other agencies involved in equity.
- Not enough of a concrete effort is being made to address discrimination for whatever reason: sexual orientation, gender, race, etc. Bullying and violence are prevalent in our schools. "You're a fag" is heard everywhere in all our schools. The SHRC could support teachers with materials on how to teach these issues or link with resources so they have the comfort level and training to address these issues. The SHRC can take information and ideas, and funnel them to other organizations.
- There's a role for the SHRC in the school system.
- The SHRC can play a role in educating non-Aboriginal teachers about the "lived experiences" of Aboriginal people and the racism experienced by Aboriginal children.

- We need this political body – it's our conscience, gives us direction. Without the SHRC, all this disappears. There will be no change, zero progress.
- The Human Rights Commission is a small agency, but its work can have ramifications for all levels of the K-12 and post-secondary systems.

Future Directions

The consultation brought home a number of key messages to the Human Rights Commission, including the need for special measures to ensure Aboriginal students receive equality of educational benefit. Participants spoke as both Aboriginal educators and Aboriginal parents, sharing many insights. One was the need for teachers and administrators to be sensitive to and counteract the racism that is part of Aboriginal students' daily lives. Another was the need for representative numbers of Aboriginal teachers, administrators and non-teaching staff at all levels of the provincial educational system. This goal will only become more challenging as the proportion of Aboriginal students increases.

In the quest for equity in education, Aboriginal educators are important guides. They are valuable resources and positive role models, for all students. Aboriginal educators face their own obstacles, as this document makes clear. At the same time, they express pride in their success and confidence in their ability to address future challenges.

The importance of Aboriginal voice in Aboriginal education was a prevailing theme of the consultation. In support of that principle, the Commission offers this record of observations and recommendations made by a group of Aboriginal educators who are noteworthy for the depth of their professional knowledge, the variety of their experience, and the breadth of their individual accomplishments.

ACRONYMS

AEDP	Aboriginal Employment Development Program
GDI	Gabriel Dumont Institute
IMED	Indian and Métis Development Program
NAPN	Native Access Program to Nursing
OTC	Office of the Treaty Commissioner
SHRC	Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission
SIAST	Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology
STF	Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation
SUNTEP	Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program
TEP	Teacher Education Program

Saskatoon Office
8th floor, 122 – 3rd Ave. N.
S7K 2H6
Telephone: (306) 933-5952
Telewriter: (306) 373-2119
Toll free: 1-800-667-9249
Fax: (306) 933-7863

Regina Office
Suite 301, 1942 Hamilton Street
S4P 2C5
Telephone: (306) 787-2530
Telewriter: (306) 787-8550
Toll free: 1-800-667-8577
Fax: (306) 787-0454

E-mail: shrc@shrc.gov.sk.ca
Web site: www.gov.sk.ca/shrc